

Retailer Responses to Public Consultations on the Adoption of Takeaway Management Zones Around Schools: A Longitudinal Qualitative Analysis

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Takeaway food is widely accessible in neighbourhood food environments. Local authorities in England can adopt urban planning-based interventions to manage the opening of new takeaway outlets in 'takeaway management zones around schools' ('exclusion zones'). Before adoption, local authorities undertake mandatory public consultation where food retailers can object to proposals. Evidence on common objections could be insightful for policymakers considering this intervention.

From 41 local authorities in England that adopted a takeaway management zone between 2009 and 2019, we identified objections submitted by or on behalf of food retailers. To analyse this publicly available data, we used reflexive thematic analysis to generate themes, and considered any changes over time.

Despite not being within scope of takeaway management zone adoption, transnational fast-food retailers commissioned planning consultants to object on their behalf. Independent retailers did not submit objections. We generated four themes: The role of takeaways in obesity, Takeaway management zone adoption, Use and interpretation of evidence, and Managing external opinions. Objections from planning consultants outlined what they believed were the causes of poor diet and obesity, and suggested alternative interventions to address them and questioned academic evidence. Over time, objections contained the same arguments but then proposed the need for a partnership to achieve a shared goal.

There is demonstrable concern from transnational fast-food retailers about proposals to adopt takeaway management zones around schools, which could prevent their future proliferation. The strategies used to delay or prevent intervention adoption are likely to be similar elsewhere, making our findings applicable to international audiences.

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